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ABSTRACT

Discussions about rural children at risk of school failure require careful consideration of the economic and cultural contexts in which disadvantaged rural children live. These contexts frequently differ from those found in metropolitan areas. A literature review discusses: (1) images and realities of rural America today; (2) poverty and unemployment in rural areas; (3) poverty and rural children; (4) rural-urban differences in at-risk factors; (5) the relationship between lack of rural economic development and poor student outcomes; (6) rural-urban cultural differences and their impact on educational attitudes, particularly attitudes about the economic utility of education; and (7) school consolidation and educational reform based on urban models. A case study of Braxton County, West Virginia, and its school system illustrates these themes. Continued economic decline since the 1930s led to massive outmigration, and both factors diminished the local tax base and prompted school consolidation. In the face of prevalent at-risk factors, the school district has pursued strategies involving implementation of effective schools guidelines and development of caring school environments. However, funding for school programs and initiatives remains problematic. Inherited economic disadvantage in rural places has consequences for the present and the future. Redefining the economic base upon which depressed rural schools build their programs must have priority in any systematic effort to improve the life chances of rural at-risk students. In addition, rural schools must demonstrate their relevance to rural students and inculcate the incentives necessary to complete school. (SV)

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AT-RISK CHILDREN AND THE REFORM OF RURAL SCHOOLS: ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

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Although there is a general lack of systematic scholarship on rural American schools and the children who attend them (DeYoung, 1987), this lack is not for want of important research themes or subjects. Over 47% of American school districts and 22% of our schools are rural, and almost 12% of children in the U.S. attend educational institutions in the countryside (Elder, 1992). As in urban America, a major theme in the lives of at-risk rural children is poverty, and the associated social factors surrounding it: lack of sound nutrition, dysfunctional families, domestic instability, poor occupational opportunities, etc. Frequently, however, the economic circumstances surrounding rural poverty vary significantly from those in metropolitan America. Topics worthy of particular attention in rural America, relevant to at-risk children, include low population density, geographic isolation and subcultures of low wage labor typically related to economic underdevelopment (e.g., Howley, 1991; Cobb, 1982; Gaventa, Smith and Willingham, 1990; Rosenfeld, 1983).

Dunne and Carlsen (1981) clearly documented what most rural education researchers readily acknowledge: that rural communities and their schools across America are quite diverse on a variety of sociological and economic characteristics. Yet, as Tom Gjelten suggests (1982), there appear to exist five basic types of rural communities and schools relevant to the interests of this monograph. Two of these rural community types, I believe, have school population issues and problems more typical to those of metropolitan areas, and thus fall outside of the scope of this essay. These include "high growth" rural places in the midst of economic expansion and/or very near expanding metropolitan areas, and "reborn" rural

communities inundated by city "refugees" attempting to escape urban congestion, crime, etc.

The other three types of rural communities and schools, according to Gjelten, invariably contain significant numbers of children and young adults whose economic and cultural legacies and prospects place them in various sorts of at-risk categories. "Stable rural" communities include stereotypical rural places frequently still involved with agriculture. In the early 1980s, Gjelten described such places as typically "prosperous, peaceful and white". I include them in some of the following discussion, however, because many such communities have continued to fall into Gjelten's forth category during the past decade: "depressed rural." In "depressed rural" communities, economic insecurity abounds, the local economy is underdeveloped, outmigration is high, and there is frequently a sizable minority population (typically African Americans and Native Americans).

Gjelten's final rural community type is often a depressed one and occasionally includes many minority group members, but in addition is isolated from mainstream America. "Isolated rural" communities and their schools are typically far removed from the transportation and cultural centers of the nation, and thus engender an additional number of social and/or cultural differences/disadvantages which most American educators organize programs to help overcome. When isolated communities and schools are also enmeshed within a regionally depressed economy, the number of factors involved with their at-risk status multiply.

Schools in declining "stable," "depressed" and "isolated" communities typically contain high numbers of at-risk children. At the same time, since local funding formulas in economically declining places are decreasingly able to support

increased schooling costs, many of the schools working with significant numbers of rural at-risk children are hard-pressed to deliver improved educational services to disadvantaged students (Phelps and Prock, 1991; Stephens, 1991). Small and isolated rural schools, in particular, have great difficulty in providing the sorts of special and remedial programs funded by pupil-teacher ratio formulas. Frequently the personnel required to deliver special education and/or compensatory programs are hard to find, under-compensated, and often shared between schools (Berkeley and Ludlow, 1991).

In addition, many rural and small schools in isolated and/or economically depressed places have low teacher salaries and morale. Often, continuing money problems force school districts to consolidate schools, thus removing these important social and cultural institutions from the communities which were or are organized around them (e.g., Sher, 1977; Peshkin, 1982; DeYoung, 1991). Thus, the instability and lack of economic opportunity which many rural families and children face in America is often compounded by community and school instabilities as well.

Aims and Organization of this Essay

This essay is about rural students at-risk of school failure in contemporary America. Naturally, discussions about the characteristics of rural children at-risk requires a careful consideration of the economic and cultural contexts in which many disadvantaged rural children live - just as it does in metropolitan America. Yet, since rural communities and rural schools usually have comparatively different economic and cultural situations and traditions than those to be found in or near our cities, I proceed in the following essay on three interrelated fronts.

Initially, I attempt a brief summary regarding the current economic status of rural American families and children. In this summary I pay particular attention to correcting many of the stereotypes most Americans have inherited regarding rural life, rural education and rural schools. Following the statistical profiles of rural America and it's schools relevant to at-risk students, I then proceed in Part II with a historical, cultural and conceptual discussion designed to give an overview of American rural education and its distinctive evolution/reform. Finally, in Part III, I proceed to illustrate a number of the conceptual themes developed in both earlier parts of this manuscript with reference to my own currently proceeding fieldwork in a rural West Virginia school and community[1].

Part I: Images and Realities of Rural America Today

During America's Country Life Movement in the early twentieth century, many civic and intellectual leaders began to have serious second-thoughts about the abandonment of rural America which accompanied our industrial development (Grantham, 1983; Danbom 1979). Since this period, programs designed to help stem the tide of rural out-migration have occasionally been attempted by those who wanted to "save" the countryside either as a monument to our past, or as a refuge for fleeing city folk. During the past several decades, this vision of rural America as some paradise lost appears related to the flight of many urban Americans away

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[1] The brief case study presented in this essay was partially funded by the Spencer Foundation of Chicago IL, and the Claude Benedum Foundation of Pittsburg, PA. I would also like to thank the Appalachia Educational Lab of Charleston, WV and West Virginia University for their particular contributions to my research and the composition of this manuscript

from perceived problems of the city (e.g., blight, poverty, traffic and congestion), even registering briefly on the demographers scale as "reverse migration trend" in the 1970s (Reid, 1989).

Yet, the data on rural life in America does not support many of the benign assumptions about the quality of life in all or even most of rural America. Rural areas still conjure up images of those places "left behind" in the process of urbanization and development. The cruel irony is that while many Americans may think they want to live in the countryside, those who live there now are typically belittled and stereotyped in a variety of negative ways for their supposed backwardness (Haas, 1991).

To underscore our confusion regarding what "rural" constitutes, even the federal government has only a default definition of rural places: in America, rural areas are only defined as non-metropolitan. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, metropolitan areas are comprised of counties with a central city of at least 50,000, together with their surrounding suburbs: everything else constitutes nonmetro America. Under such a nomenclature, approximately 25 percent of the U.S. population lives in nonmetro (thus by default, rural) areas. However, among nonmetro counties, those with the largest growth rates this century have typically been in counties adjacent to metropolitan ones, suggesting the growing link between many nonmetro communities and employment/cultural ties to metropolitan America (Gjelten, 1982; CDF, 1992).

A related misunderstanding of rural America by those living in our cities is that rural America is primarily agricultural. Yet, this is no longer the case, nor has it been for decades. According to the Department of Agriculture, there are eight

primary types of economic activities to be found among America's 2,443 nonmetro counties: farming, mining, manufacturing, retirement, government services, federal lands, persistent poverty, and "unclassified." Of these 2,443 counties, only 702, or 29%, are farm "dependent." Furthermore, there are 242 non-metro counties categorized as persistent poverty counties; 200 counties whose economic base is from mining; and 515 counties whose local economies are based on retirement income (Bender et al., 1985).

This suggests that non-metropolitan America is very diverse, that much of it is non-agricultural, that much of it is poor; and that many of the contexts and subcultures of rural America are heavily influenced by the age, income and the extractive nature of occupations of those who live and work within them. Furthermore, even where agriculture is the dominant industry, most modern farming is really "agri-business," meaning that fewer and fewer people are actually engaged in farming even as crop yields rise. Instead, we have fewer farmers with more and better machines replacing more stereotypical family farmers who now increasingly seek off-farm employment if and when possible. Today, successful farmers more typically consider themselves to be high-technology businessmen engaged in agriculture: meanwhile, in rural states without the geographical and climatological characteristics required for agribusiness, there are very few modern "farmers;" and there are literally entire rural U.S. states which do not generate enough agricultural products to be considered agricultural by the U.S. government.

Accordingly, fewer and fewer American rural children live on farms in stereotypical farm households. Rather, only about one-twelfth of all rural children live on farms, and only one of eleven rural jobs is a farm-related job (CDF, 1992).

As well, almost two-thirds of rural mothers are employed, even though child care in rural America is far less available and affordable than in metropolitan America. The Children's Defense Fund (1992) summarizes the community status of today's rural children thus:

> Where do rural children live if not on farms? They live in many different types of communities: in trailer camps, mountain settlements, and back woods communities; on former farms and ranches; on reservations; along country roads; or in small villages. Some live in larger towns or small cities, including declining small manufacturing centers (p. 5).

Poverty in Rural America

As noted earlier, there were 242 persistent poverty counties in 1985: counties where the per capita income of residents remained in the lowest U.S. income quintile during at least the past four decades. As well, rural per capita incomes which showed a slight gain in other rural counties during the 1970s once again took a serious downturn during the 1980s, even in counties dependent upon manufacturing or extraction (i.e., mining and timbering). All these industries have experienced hard times in the last decade (Reid, 1989). Moreover, manufacturing in rural America - undertaken by either large or small corporations - tends to locate primarily low-wage and routine production operations in rural areas (Lyson, 1989; McGranahan, 1987). As a result, occupational wages paid in rural America are approximately three-fourths of metro levels, even though costs of living in rural America are generally comparable to metro living costs (CDF, 1992).

Even the economic growth which occasionally re-emerges in rural communities is comparatively marginal. Most new jobs are either minimum wage

or close to it (Reid, 1990). Moreover, full-time rural workers in service industries have extremely high poverty rates. This fact is particularly onerous, since most rural economists predict that the service industries in rural America, as in metropolitan America, will remain the main occupational opportunities there for the foreseeable future (O'Hare, 1988).

Extraction and routine manufacturing in rural places have also been adversely affected by recessions of the late twentieth century, and these industries appear particularly vulnerable to international market pressures. For example, although many communities attracted manufacturing plants in the 1960s and 1970s, many of these left rural America during the economic hard times of the early 1980s to go "off-shore." The net loss of manufacturing jobs even between 1979 and 1986 in rural America was 12 percent (McGranahan, 1987). So too, mining operations continue to mechanize in modern America. For example, while coal tonnage in the Appalachian states continues to rise, so do the numbers of unemployed miners. For all of these reasons, and perhaps for others, most chronically poor counties in the nation continue to be located in nonmetro areas (particularly in the South and in Appalachia), and matters continue to get worse. By 1986, the nonmetro poverty rate was 50 percent higher than the metro rate (O'Hare, 1988). In fact, general poverty rates for all non-metro counties nearly equaled the poverty rate for our central cities in the late 1980s (CDF, 1992; Porter, 1989). Rural poverty in the 1980s also stayed higher, rose more rapidly, and fell more slowly in the "recovery" period (O'Hare, 1988). Displaced rural workers were unemployed more than 50 percent longer than urban workers and, when they did return to work, were more

likely than urban workers to take pay cuts and lose insurance benefits (Podgursky, 1988).

Furthermore, 29% of the rural poor are minorities, and they suffer more severely from poverty than either rural whites or urban minorities. For example, 44 percent of rural African Americans were poor in 1987, compared to 33 percent of their urban counterparts. The poverty rate of rural African Americans exceeded the poverty rate of rural whites by over 200 percent, and similar contrasts characterize the relationship of poverty rates among rural Hispanics and their white and urban counterparts (Porter, 1989; CDF, 1992).

American Indians and Alaska Natives, too are typically to be found in rural places. Over one-half of the nation's Native Americans live on or near reservations, located principally in rural areas. Among the ten largest tribes, the poverty rate for families varies from nearly 43 percent for Navajos to about 18 percent for Cherokees (Hodgkinson, 1990).

Children and Poverty

The effects of poverty upon children and their life chances in rural America has occasionally been written about by educators, although probably not to the same extent as in urban America. In the 1960s and 1970s, stories of poverty in "the other America" were well rehearsed, and many of these stories dealt with subcultures of poverty which engulfed migrant children, the children and families of poor white and black tenant farmers, and children in coal camps and towns (e.g., Harrington, 1962; Coles, 1967; Fetterman, 1970).

Many writings on rural poverty during the Great Society period echoed earlier themes regarding how rural places and their inhabitants could be saved: i.e., that once rural folk had access to the knowledge and social programs emerging in metropolitan America, their "cultures of poverty" would be disrupted and their children emancipated. Later assessments were more critical: i.e., that many local communities and their children were trapped in declining local economies with few real avenues of upward social mobility, save for the "escape" to the city where they became city problems rather than country problems (e.g., Obermiller and Philliber, 1987).

In any event, even though we have known about rural poverty and have had social and educational programs for children enmeshed in such poverty for over a quarter-century, contemporary data on rural families and the children of the rural poor is not good. As noted earlier, the number of rural children living in poverty has continued to rise during the past two decades. Today over 22 percent of all rural children live in families officially below the poverty line. In some primarily rural states, the percentage of children living in poverty households exceeds 30 percent, and in 28 rural counties, over fifty percent of all children live in families below the poverty level (CDF, 1992).

Stereotypes regarding poverty of minority children in our central cities obscure the fact that rural minority poverty rates generally exceed those found in the city. For example, the poverty rate for rural African-American children exceeds similar rates for African American children in our cities: 53% compared to 47% (CDF, 1992). So too, on many of our largest Native American reservations, the numbers of children living in poverty exceeds fifty percent. And among the

poorest of Americans are migrant workers and their families: yet because we have few statistics specifically related to migrant families, the hundreds of thousands of (primarily Latino) poor children from these families for the most part go undocumented.

While unemployment in the rural U.S. is typically higher than in urban areas, even employed rural workers earn significantly less than workers in metropolitan America. Controlling for inflation, annual pay per job **fell** 7 percent from 1979 to 1988 for rural off-farm workers, even as more and more rural families moved closer to metropolitan areas in order to seek employment. This may be one of the reasons why one in three rural poor families with children cannot escape poverty, even though the household head is a full time worker (CDF, 1992).

According to the Children's Defense Fund:

> As a result of declining wages, the poverty rate of rural families with at least one worker rose by one-third (from 8.0 percent to 10.7 percent) between 1979 and 1987. The poverty rate of working families actually increased faster than the poverty rate of rural families overall (which rose by one-forth, from 10.9 percent to 13.7 percent) during the same period (1992; p. 37).

At the same time as real wages for rural American workers during the past decade was on the decline, several other demographic and political factors have exacerbated rural family structures and rural poverty in the U.S. For example, as in metropolitan America, the number of single parent families has increased in rural America over the past twenty years. And since most of these families are headed

by women (who earn even less than men), the number of these families living in poverty has also increased.

So too, government assistance programs have changed and had negative consequences for many rural children and families. In 1979, federal government benefits reduced poverty levels for approximately twenty percent of rural families. In 1987, only ten percent of rural families have so benefitted. As well, maximum state AFDC benefits in rural states are generally lower than similar benefits in more urban states - with the notable exception of Alaska. Such benefits generally fall around $700 per family in (metropolitan) California, New York and Connecticut, but are less than $200 for families in such rural states as Alabama, Tennessee and Mississippi.

Another misconception of rural families living in poverty is that their living costs must be lower as housing costs and agricultural products are both significantly cheaper. On the one hand they are right: rural dwelling costs are generally lower in rural America. Yet, since such housing costs as garbage collection, sewage, and water are included in metropolitan figures, the fact that most rural Americans have to provide their own water lines, gas lines, septic services and garbage disposal costs independently of housing suggests that such statistical comparisons may be very misleading. So too, few rural families produce more than a fraction of their foodstuffs in the 1990s. And transportation costs in rural America are significantly higher than in metropolitan areas (CDF, 1992).

Schooling Issues related to Rural At-risk Children

"Rural" is typically not a factor operationalized for analysis in educational research (Sher, 1977; DeYoung, 1987). Therefore, earlier studies related to the

situations and learner outcomes of rural children in America were either subsumed within larger data sets or were available only in smaller community studies involving qualitative methods. In the last several years, however, a number of national organizations interested in the status of at-risk children in rural America have undertaken and published major works on this topic. Many of these reports document rather substantial regional differences in the causes and consequences of regional poverty and school "underperformance." (e.g., NRDI, 1990; CEDaR, 1987).

The National Rural Development Institute (1990) completed a large national survey of rural school districts specifically related to perceptions held by school administrators regarding the nature and severity of at-risk conditions in rural schools. Responses of 185 rural school administrators were compared with those of 71 urban and 56 suburban districts. While the survey return percentages were arguably too low for the sorts of statistical analyses policy makers might desire (the return rate was only about 25%), the tentative findings were consistent with the sorts of judgments to be made from the previous review of income and family conditions in rural America: depressing.

Among the at-risk categories proposed by the NRDI included substance abuse; depression/low self esteem; child abuse; sexually active; disabled; illiteracy; and poverty. The NRDI also included several student disability categories and school levels to co-vary with their at-risk categories. Respondents were asked to describe the percentage of their students (both handicapped and non-handicapped) who fell into the various categories provided. In comparisons of rural vs. non-rural children across all student types and at-risk categories, 39 of the variables analyzed

yielded significant differences between rural and non-rural students using multiple analysis of variance protocols. Of the 39, reported incidences of at-risk situations/conditions were **higher** for rural students than non-rural students in 34 comparisons. That is, in only five of 39 comparisons did non-rural (typically urban) school administrators report higher incidences of at-risk situations in their schools than did rural school administrators. In all other direct comparisons the results were about equal. In the non-handicapped category, 19.3% of rural students were reported be from dysfunctional families; 18.8% from poverty households; 13.7% were reported as being depressed or with low self esteem; and 11.4% as being victims of child abuse. According to the study: "One of the most consistent features noted in the analysis of the survey data was that rural schools estimated higher percentages of children, both handicapped and non-handicapped, falling into the at-risk categories" (p. 7).

Another survey attempted in the mid-1980s shed some light upon the concerns of rural school officials, some of which pertains to the issues raised in this overview. In a report to the National Rural, Small Schools Task force, by CEDaR (1987), 2,445 rural school teachers, superintendents, school board members were queried regarding their perceptions of priorities for rural schools across the nation. Among their responses were many which reflect national concerns as well as rural ones: e. g., 60% believed that thinking and reasoning skills of their students were inadequate and required attention, and 36% believed that the quality of staff in-service programs need to be improved. On the other hand, several reported areas of concern were ones earlier suggested in this review. For example, 60% of survey respondents were particularly concerned with the academic performance of their

(rural) students from low-income families, 48% were concerned with their inability to reward or recognize outstanding teachers; and 41% feared for the levels of self esteem and aspirations of their students.

In a similar vein, regional differences were clearly recognizable in the CEDaR survey. In Appalachia and the South - home of most of the depressed and isolated school systems in the U.S. - the balance of strengths as opposed to needs was most pronounced. To quote directly from the study:

> The Southeastern states (Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina, and South Carolina) express greater concern than any other region of the country on 22 of the 40 items surveyed. The region ties for first place in three other categories. And comes in second in seven others. To make matters worse, other regions are able to produce a mixture of low and high concerns. That's to say most regions can find something to crow about. Not so the Southeast. ... The region just north isn't a whole lot better off. The Appalachian states (Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia) mirror most of the concerns expressed by their Southern colleagues. Seventy-five percent of the Appalachian respondents (compared to 81% in the Southeast) say there's a major need to improve the overall academic performance of students from low-income families (P. 9&10).

The Children's Defense Fund, too, has attempted to overview a variety of factors influencing the situations of rural at-risk children. In summarizing a number of data-based studies, the CDF argues that rural schools and their students

suffer a number of important weaknesses compared to schools in much of metropolitan America. For example, providing equal educational opportunities in rural places ought to cost more than in metropolitan places, given economies of scale considerations. That is, in sparsely populated school districts, costs of offering similar services and/or courses as in larger schools is typically higher when calculated on a per student basis. Yet, since many rural states have no or minimal cost equalization formulas based upon population density, local taxes must be relied upon heavily to equalize expenditures. Naturally, in school systems with little ability to generate such extra taxes (e.g., school systems/districts in the 242 persistent poverty counties), significant inequities may arise. These inequities become translated into fewer mathematics and advanced placement courses in rural high schools, fewer programs for either gifted and talented children or alternative school programs and programs for pregnant teenagers, or in some cases the failure to provide transportation to and from school at all (DeYoung, 1991a). According to the Children's Defense Fund:

> Because of their low revenues, rural communities spend about 10 percent less per student than do metro communities (or $231 less per student in 1982, equivalent to $5,775 for a classroom with 25 students), even though local rural governments reserve a considerably larger portion of their limited budgets for education.
>
> lead (CDF, 1992: p. 108).

The CDF study also reported on a number of other metro - non metro comparisons of schools based on national studies like the High School and Beyond Survey and the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Among the

findings: rural teachers are less experienced, less well trained and have faster turnover rates than metropolitan teachers; achievement scores for rural students are slightly below those of students in metropolitan areas; high school dropout rates are higher in rural America than in metropolitan America; rural school dropouts are less likely to return to school than are those in our cities; outmigration of young people who have completed high school is higher than the general population, leaving lower educated citizens behind; and the rural college-going and college-completing rate is lower for rural high school graduates than for graduates of metro schools.

The Children's Defense Fund concludes its analysis of rural education factors related to concerns of this essay with a host of recommendations for rural school improvement - which are attached in Appendix A. Significantly, it sounds an important theme which overlaps a number of the focal points of this entire review - although my own view on the "chicken and egg" relationship between economic development and education is reversed. In my judgement, current schooling philosophies and practice stem from urban and industrial needs which have been less rapidly pursued in many rural places: this has placed many rural schools and school systems culturally and economically "behind" from the beginning. While I develop such themes shortly, intervening in the situations of at-risk students is the topic here, and the CDF's perspective on current situations is quite defensible and important:

> The poor state of (rural) education has trapped many communities in a vicious cycle. Without an educated work force, many rural communities are shunned by employers who could offer skilled, well-paying jobs.

> Without a stronger tax base and local business support for education, these communities cannot finance school improvements. Fewer skilled job opportunities and lower school quality mean that many rural students and families adopt lower educational expectations, and the most talented rural students move away, beginning a new generational cycle of lost rural talent and energy (CDF 192, p. 107).

Part II: Schooling, Instrumentalism, and Rural Education Reform

In the majority of the (few) accounts of rural poverty and rural schooling available, the sorts of economic and sociological data just presented are then followed by policy and funding suggestions which might facilitate educational improvement strategies at state and/or federal levels (e.g., Helge, 1990; Stephens, 1991; CDF, 1992). See Appendix A for one such comprehensive list.

Yet, most contemporary observers of rural school situations and problems, including those just cited, pay little attention to local school and community **histories** and **cultures** as they pertain to the issues at hand. In rural regions contiguous to metropolitan areas and/or where economic development trends have culturally transformed a host of local institutions and employment possibilities, such histories and traditions are probably less central to understanding and interpreting the social and economic significance of schooling. On the other hand, in depressed and isolated schools and school districts -where arguably the majority of at-risk students live and go to school - such factors are probably quite important for anyone interested in positively altering public schooling possibilities. I begin this section by wishing to make explicit one of the primary underlying assumption in contemporary American education under which much of our current concern for

at-risk children is articulated: i.e., that schooling in the U.S. today is important because it has economic utility for individuals and for society. Pushed further, formal schooling in the U.S. through at least high school has by now become an ultimatum rather than an opportunity. Although there remains a strong (and perhaps valid) academic criticism of "credentialism" in American culture (Collins, 1979; Rumberger, 1981), it remains the case that most of the children this essay is concerned with who are not equipped with at least a high school diploma are and will remain economically and socially at-risk throughout their future lives.

While the ideological belief in the instrumental utility of formal schooling remains a conviction among most educators, such a conviction was not the basis upon which rural schools in the U.S. were primarily based, and equivocal feelings about such utilities in many (often depressed and isolated) rural communities remains even today. Which is the topic of this portion of this essay.

Formal education in the West has invariably been championed/ interpreted since the industrial revolution as a primary tool for transforming societies and making the outcomes of schooling related to economic growth and social progress (Bowman, 1966; Schultz, 1981; Harrold, 1985; Durkheim, 1972). Furthermore, in the international educational community the "modernizing" possibilities/ideologies of schooling are often explicitly stated in educational expansion initiatives (e.g., Inkeles and Smith, 1974; Boli and Ramirez; 1986). In developing nations, the provision of mass education is typically initiated under an explicit human capital formation rationale, and school facilities and intended outcomes are related to theorized "human resource" requirements of the industrial sector (Psacharopoulos,

1986; Blaug, 1985). Later fine-tuning and/or overhaul of the education-economic development linkage then continues as part of state policy formulation.

On the other hand, in societies with pre-industrial schooling traditions, continued modernization forces and strategies are typically confronted with alternative educational philosophies and practices. Stories of school "reform" and "improvement," is such places then often have a different ring than they do in societies where schooling has typically been equated with national economic development from the beginning (e.g. Fuller, 1991; Altbach and Kelley, 1984).

In the U.S., many rural schools pre-date the advent of common schooling and secondary education, both of which were specifically instituted toward instrumental outcomes of schooling in a multi-ethnic and rapidly urbanizing America. Today, expenditures for public education and expectations for student success remain underlying themes of contemporary school reform dedicated to the view that educational investments are investments in the national economy, improving worker productivity, and promoting national citizenship (e.g. Schultz, 1981; DeYoung, 1989a; Spring, 1980). Such reform efforts are similar to those internationally, yet with our decentralized system of school governance, school improvements must become filtered through literally thousands of state and local education agencies.

In a particularly convincing analysis, Boli and Ramirez (1986) suggest that contemporary educational policies and practice rely on various world views and institutional structures which I suggest directly conflict with the underlying value structures and economic experiences of many rural communities. For example, market-driven national economies depend upon individuals (not families,

communities, etc.) becoming primary social units, and children (rather than adults) become the main focus of public schooling. Schools thus increasingly become sites for the creation of individual actors oriented toward occupations and careers potentially far removed from local communities (see also Spring, 1980; Dreeben, 1968).

Pedagogical orientations of modern schooling, according to Boli and Ramirez, involve curricular and organizational teachings which undercut the importance of place and kinship bonds - which I also argue are still of significance in many rural American communities. In their place, children are taught to believe that individual success in contemporary America primarily occurs as a function of state economic development policy and national/ international trade success. Further, as the key to economic participation is ideologically linked to educational attainment, citizens are encouraged to accept the centrality of school certificates and credentials in their lives - one of the assumptions upon which this work is also partly based. School documents/credentials thus legitimate the individual's entrance into the national workplace, a workplace at least partly controlled by the state. According to Boli and Ramirez:

> The ideology supporting mass education (emphasizes) certain social utilities. Education provides a better work force to further economic development. ... Education creates good citizens; it makes people loyal members of the national polity. ... It creates a happier, more satisfied population, both as an end in itself, and for social and political stability. ... In short, education derives its legitimacy from its purported importance for reaching virtually all the goals of modern society (p 18).

Creating a "One Best System" in the U.S.

International scholarship on the modernizing possibilities and/or strategies of mass schooling is well established - particularly as "modernity" affects rural places. Yet, most domestic educational scholarship overlooks the clash of economic and cultural factors associated with rural/urban differences in the U.S. (Sher, 1981). Issues involved with rural schooling and rural school reform in the U.S. were primarily treated historically as by-products of **deficient** rather than culturally different schooling traditions (DeYoung, 1987; Sher, 1977). The public school revolution which occurred in this nation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was primarily an **urban** and **industrial** inspired revolution, although at the time it was announced as a unilateral victory for the forces of moral uplift and social progress (Tyack, 1974; Perkinson, 1991). Exploding city growth during this period was fueled by rural in-migration and foreign immigration. And such demographic changes were also accompanied by labor unrest and middle class perceptions that newly arriving city dwellers were driving down their previous "quality of life." As a consequence, school building and school reform movements quickly gathered momentum.

In searching for institutional models upon which to organize city schools, city leaders and professional educators quickly judged rural educational models as too archaic and unprofessional for their purposes. Schooling was increasingly championed by reformers as an activity best guided by specialized knowledge as supervised by administrators well versed in both the understanding of the science of child development and of scientific (i.e., efficient) management (Katz, 1971; Tyack, 1974; Kliebard, 1986). Later, the "scientific" and "professional" views of

schooling championed by urban superintendents increasingly moved (with them) into state departments of education, and continued to challenge many organizational and curricular principles of rural schools. Professionalizing public education statewide meant that teachers and principals required more formal training and certification, and that better accountability measures were required (Tyack, 1974). In the main, late nineteenth and early twentieth century school reformers had little but pity and/or contempt for rural schools and rural communities (Cubberley, 1914).

From the perspective of urban educators, the critique of rural elementary and secondary school finance, curricula and organization administration was probably correct. While there was clearly much diversity among rural schools across the nation then (as there is now), many of their characteristics were similar, and offensive to metropolitan-based school reformers. Untrained school board members and trustees made many school decisions; attendance rates were generally lower than in the city; drop-out rates were high; building maintenance was usually performed on a volunteer basis by parents; rural teachers frequently were less well prepared than city teachers; classes usually were mixed-grade; supervision of one and two room schools was administratively almost impossible, etc. (Tyack, 1974; Katz, 1971).

Reformers interested in "improving" rural schools generally believed improvement could happen in only one of two ways: either rural schools would disappear as continued out-migration removed children from rural places; or alternatively, rural schools could be made to look and operate more like urban ones. Yet, while many school reformers of the twentieth century labored under the belief

that rural schools were deficient, a better interpretation is that various rural school characteristics represented cultural values quite different than the ones which help found the common school movement. And then as now, many religious, locally-based, and non-industrial rural cultures were frequently at odds with the emerging conventional wisdom of schooling (DeYoung and Theobald, 1991; Fuller, 1982).

Rural Views of Schooling

One source of tension in rural places toward compulsory school attendance beyond the elementary years involved a resistance to the elitism inherent in the liberal arts curriculum of nineteenth century secondary schools. With important exceptions, many "common men" challenged (and still challenge) the alleged superiority of mental over manual labor inherent in late nineteenth century calls for secondary education reform, reforms which until well into the twentieth century appeared to many as preparatory for college enrollments in towns and cities, not an education which would return native sons and daughters to the land (Perkinson, 1991; Kliebard, 1986; Theobald, 1991).

When and where the secondary school curriculum **did** appear locally relevant to the lives of rural Americans, it appears to have been an important success. Kliebard (1986) argues that enrollment gains and success of many rural high schools appear historically related to the "project method" made possible during the progressive era. When our rural communities were still primarily agriculture communities, vo-ag secondary school programs were popular because they could be directly applied out-of-school. Yet, as the direct application of such programs has faded in agriculturally declining places, questions of the utility of formal

schooling in such locales have made high school completion rates almost as marginal as they frequently are in our inner cities (Fine, 1991; Weis, 1990). In the current era, high school completion appears relatively low where graduation appears to bear little local utility due to large-scale unemployment and/or where low skilled extractive and/or service industries provide the major source of employment (DeYoung, 1985; Bickel, 1989; Bickel and Pappagiannis, 1988).

If many rural Americans remained skeptical of schooling for distant careers until relatively recently, other teachings of many rural schools which were not as problematic came under attack by metropolitan school reformers later in the twentieth century. Specifically, Christian moral instruction was an important curricular orientation of most American schools before the Progressive era: yet, the secular and professional interests of many school reformers directly challenged these moral underpinnings and led to massive rural resistance in much of the country. For example, since small communities in many primarily rural states are composed of children from native protestant families, both white and African-American, it is in such states (e.g., Kentucky, Arkansas, Tennessee, West Virginia) where challenges to proscriptions against displaying the ten commandments, challenges to the teaching of evolution, and/or battles over "offensive" textbooks have been seen (Page and Clelland, 1978; Ginger, 1958). In rural America school/church ties were historically quite important. And in some communities such ties still remain central and often at odds with formal state school policies.

Rural School Consolidation

Other cultural teachings/assumptions present in many rural communities were and sometimes remain in opposition to the characteristics of modern

instrumental schooling. Historically, many rural communities placed high value on traditional family (and extended family) relationships, sense of community, the importance of being close to the land, etc. (Haas, 1991). Yet, rural school reform throughout the twentieth century devalued and undercut such traditional interests via centralization and consolidation movements launched under the auspices of professionalism, curricular diversity and efficiency. Anti-nepotism reforms for rural schools, for example, have frequently been mounted by state departments of education in recent decades, as in the recent Kentucky Educational Reform Act.

Although the impact of the metropolitan and now national school curriculum has only recently re-emerged as a topic worthy of investigation (Theobald, 1992), the impact of modern organizational forms on traditionally small and local rural schools is not. Guided by the rationale of **educational improvement**, many of the places which used to provide schooling have themselves been lost. As late as 1930, there were 128,000 school districts and over 238,000 schools in America. By 1980, however, the number of school districts had dropped to 16,000 and schools to 61,000 (Stephens and Perry, 1991). Although many of these school closings were probably attributable to rural out-migration, many more were accomplished as means to cost-savings, more efficient administration, and curricular diversity.

Even today, at a time when many national school improvement efforts have targeted large schools as impersonal places difficult for parents to penetrate or participate in, some primarily rural states continue massive rural school closure policies under economies of scale arguments (Sher, 1983; DeYoung and Howley, 1992). And again, the students and communities most inconvenienced - in terms

of bus ride times for students and inaccessibility to parents - are those most isolated and impoverished, or at-risk.

Part III: An Illustrative Case Study

The problems of rural students at-risk of school failure and/or incompletion in the U.S. are in many ways similar to problems of low income children and young people in metropolitan America. Yet, many chronically depressed and isolated rural communities still involved in extractive economies or ones dependent upon single labor-intensive and unskilled industries often contain schools without the funds to remediate many schooling deficiencies associated with rural poverty; frequently include family and community values inconsistent with modern career orientations and instrumental schooling; and often contain families who believe that advanced schooling is unaffordable for their children.

As the tone of the forgoing analysis suggests, my own position on "best ways" to alleviate the economic and social conditions related to poor school success in rural places would place economic development and growth at the forefront. My first strategy for improving the life chances of children in many depressed and isolated rural communities then would involve economic development initiatives whereby the instrumental utility of high school completion and college entrance would make good personal sense for adolescents, and providing the sorts of jobs for indigent local families so that nutrition and family stability problems would diminish for younger children.

Yet, such efforts are probably not under the control of most who read these pages -nor are they under the direct control of many who live and work in rural schools across the country. The West Virginia county school system in which I

am currently pursuing a variety of research themes relevant to the general aims of this essay provides a good case study of many of the topics discussed so far, as well as a number of school-based strategies for at-risk children being pursued there.

The situations of children in Braxton County, West Virginia schools provide good illustrations of the various cultural, historical and economic forces arrayed against the life-chances of many children in central Appalachia and in other rural American communities. The school in which I am working contains two officially distinct populations: a K-4 elementary school and a small 5-8 middle school. Total enrollment of all grades plus the kindergarten (and a new pre-kindergarten) is approximately 295. The school in question (Burnsville) was constructed between the years of 1916 and 1925, and designed as a "town" school for grades 1-12. Over the years, however, the town's once prosperous economy has collapsed and the school - now administratively two schools - is considered rural. It's attendance area has also changed so that "the rural kids" in the countryside who used to sometimes continue their schooling in town after elementary grades are now all bused into Burnsville school daily. All of the former one and two room schools which flourished earlier in this century in outlying areas of the county have been closed during the past three decades.

Burnsville is the kind of place where everybody can talk about "the good old days," when there were jobs to be had and there was money to spend, but where few people have such discussions now. In fact, most families in and around the town of Burnsville today are economically disadvantaged in multiple ways. The majority of households in northern Braxton County either depend upon some form of government income assistance and/or have absent household heads working in

far removed construction or timbering industries. Frequently, children of the school dwell in trailers or small frame housing located strategically along rural roads, and often they live in multiple generational units. Life in Braxton County may be rurally based: but it doesn't resemble any of the positive stereotypes about rural living which attract suburbanites ever further from central cities.

Braxton County: A Brief History

Braxton County is the central-most of West Virginia's 55 counties. It's history, like that of most contiguous counties is critically tied to America's industrial revolution: but its ties to this revolution, many claim, have been to its detriment (Eller, 1982; Lewis et.al., 1978). The county has historically depended upon the extractive industries of timbering, coal mining and gas and oil drilling during the past hundred years. Unfortunately, most of these industries have usually been owned by outside corporations who pay few taxes on the wealth they control underground; and with a nation-wide recession in manufacturing, even the extractive jobs remaining in Braxton County typically require little formal schooling.

Like many other rural regions of the nation, those initially settling in central West Virginia in the early nineteenth century came from the east and north to cultivate lands unavailable to them in older colonies. However, unlike many of the other rural settlements in America, agricultural opportunities in West Virginia were more limited in size and scope. Most of the small scale farming in the "hollows" of thousands of rivers and streams in West Virginia led to a more marginal/subsistence lifestyle than was available in better located agricultural settings to the east and to the west in the U.S. (Rice, 1985).

The isolation of the mountaineer in central West Virginia led to primarily local economic, social and kinship systems whose social organization of production and reproduction differed from other regions of the U.S. (Eller, 1982). The small scale and subsistence farming prevalent throughout much of western Virginia (i.e., few slave-holding plantations), coupled with emerging economic alliances with capitalists in Pennsylvania and New York, led to the succession of this portion of the state from Virginia in 1863, and the creation of West Virginia.

Yet Braxton County was geographically and economically fortunate in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries compared to other Appalachian regions. For, while the county's history saw substantial dependence upon small scale agriculture, two navigable rivers linking the county with the outside world enabled a number of successful commercial activities to develop there. In addition to such pre-industrial commercial ventures as tannery, and salt harvesting, regional economic development efforts included commercial pottery, a cannery and a bottling plant.

Transportation possibilities made possible by the Elk and Little Kanawha rivers also enabled the construction of several small towns in Braxton County, including Burnsville, Sutton and Gassaway. The early prosperity of these places is apparent in local newspaper accounts there in the early twentieth century. These places had newspapers, banks, hotels, department stores, various mainline church denominations ... and public schools. In other words, all the accoutrements associated with a strong and growing middle class.

The schools, in particular, showed signs of "progress" during the period, as the old subscription schools and later one-room schools increasingly became

eclipsed in the larger population centers with larger and graded schools - much as was the earlier pattern in northeastern states (Cremin, 1961). Reading central West Virginia teacher oral histories of the early twentieth century makes schooling there sound very similar to schooling to be found in most American communities prior to the great depression (Dick, 1976).

By the 1920s, Braxton County contained approximately 140 rural schools, and four high schools. Some children graduated from outlying one and two room schools and came into the high schools. Most probably did not. Up until the past several decades, employment in extractive industries didn't usually require a high school education. And when there was work in the mines, in gas exploration and in timbering - typically the major sources of work in Braxton County - there was invariably little incentive to develop the sorts of advanced professional skills that might have led to a job in some distant place whose industries fed off of Braxton County's extractive economy.

Although timber and then coal were first exploited and exported from the county, later economic development efforts involved some actual manufacturing of natural resources; like the activities found at the Sutton Chemical Plant. Jobs created by the chemical industry had marginal demands for skilled labor, but they were probably better than no chemical jobs which occurred after WWII with the growth of synthetic chemicals.

Part of a 1920 local newspaper account about the Sutton Chemical plant read as follows:

> The large plant of the Sutton Chemical Company, which was nearly two years in building, was put in operation April 27 of this year. Charcoal,

acetate of lime and wood alcohol are manufactured. ... The plant consists of a number of large and substantial buildings, among which are the retort builder, the dryers, coolers, loading sheds, tube still houses, machine shop, settling pans, boiler and pump house, transfer shed, charcoal storage, acetate storage, office building, warehouses, ensign house, sawmill plant, etc. ... The plant has a capacity of eighty cords of wood daily. The wood is obtained from a large tract of timberland on Wolf creek, to which a standard gauge railroad has been built, and smaller tracts owned by the company in this section. All the timber in these tracts suitable for lumber is cut in the company's sawmill, (and) the waste is converted into chemicals. ... When in full operation the plant employs 150 men and from 200 to 400 are employed in the woods.

Unfortunately, the chemical plant was owned by investors from the northeast, most of whom left when the industry collapsed:

Henry M. Miner, of New York, is president of the company; A. Cameron of Chicago is vice-president, Chas. L. Read, of Newark, N.J., is secretary, and Harold T. Edgar, of New York is treasurer. L.D. Hawkins, of New York, is assistant to the president and spends (only) a portion of his time here.

"Quality of Life" Prospects in Booming Braxton County

Dramatic growth and economic progress was apparently the norm in Braxton County from about 1880 to 1930. And, while many children whom we would today define as at-risk were undoubtedly located up many of the county's hollows, high growth expectations and growing local revenues suggested bright futures. An

observer of progress in Sutton remarked favorably upon the transformation of this town from a "small shoestring village" in 1885 to a "very citified and up-to-date metropolis" less than forty years later, a metropolis:

> equipped with all the modern conveniences and improvements, such as two railroads, two paved highways, paved streets, water works, ice plant, natural gas, electric lights, the buildings modern in every particular, and a population a dozen times greater than it was in April 1885; greater in number, yes -greater in spirit, no - and this goes for Braxton County as well as the county seat - no finer class of citizens could then or can now be found in the state of West Virginia or elsewhere, than those I found in the year 1885 (Byrne, 1940:146-147).

Both Sutton's and then Burnsville's economies were at first based on extractive industries and local manufacturing, and both sorts of activities were made commercially possible by the Elk and Little Kanawha rivers, respectively. Sutton was located on the Elk, which flowed south into the Great Kanawha and finally into the Ohio. Burnsville was located at the northern end of the county in the valley of the Little Kanawha. This river passes through oil and gas country and into the Ohio at Parkersburg. Timber extraction, oil and gas drilling, several veneer factories, a (wooden) wheel factory -supplying Ford motors - and a wagon factory put Burnsville "on the map" in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Gassaway, closer to the southern end of the county, was literally created several decades later by the railroad industry, when a switching yard and engine maintenance facility were constructed there. The two major railroad lines through Braxton County in the first several decades of the twentieth century facilitated the

growth of a mercantile industry to support other various extractive and manufacturing industries in all three towns. In each place, civic pride and the belief in economic and social progress appeared rampant, at least until the 1940s. And each of the towns appears to have had the sorts of civic and business support necessary for community school improvement which is so difficult in many rural places today.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, all three towns were thriving, the county was still growing, and public schooling appears to have been a popular "growth industry" as well. Local boosters described their world in ways viewed incredulously by most current "Braxtonians."

There are more opportunities open to the people of Braxton county than in any other section of the coming great state of West Virginia. ... Come to Braxton County, West Virginia, the land of milk and honey, insofar as this world's goods are concerned. You will be made welcome. If you are seeking a place on which to locate a manufacturing plant, we can help you; if you are looking for a good home, we can accommodate you; if you are trying to locate yourself where you will have all the advantages that a good school system will make, come to Braxton; if you want to buy a home and live in perfect contentment, come to Braxton; or, if you are desirous of buying one of the best farms to be found anywhere, come to Braxton County, West Virginia. We have all these and more. We invite you again to come--come and see if what we have told you is not true. Fact of the matter is that your investigation will prove to your own satisfaction that we have just what you are looking for and more than we have enumerated.

Braxton County: A Casualty of American Progress?

Braxton County has lived and died based on the strength of its extractive industries and the forms of transportation used to connect it and them to the outside world. When its towns prospered, its schools prospered. Yet, as the boom periods of coal, timber, oil and gas subsided, and as the railroads and local manufacturing firms were undercut by the "hard roads" which went around central West Virginia more than through them, regional economic decline also became personal and institutional disasters:

> Although we in West Virginia are living in the twentieth century, we do not have two county seats in the state connected with a hard surface road. Our farmers can haul their products to market only at certain times of the year. Hauling costs amount to 37 cents per ton mile as against 10 and 12 cents in states that have improved roads. Thousands of bushels of fruit rot each year because it cannot be hauled to shipping points; schools in some sections are in session only four or five months each year because roads become impassable; in fact, practically everything that is deplorable in our state can be traced directly or indirectly to our bad roads (Braxton Democrat, 1920, vol. 27, section 3, page 8).

By the 1950s, Braxton County, West Virginia had joined the ranks of most economically depressed regions of the country, where unemployment was high, wages low, and where dramatic out-migration of many of its citizens had been occurring for at least two decades. This is a sobering fact considering that for over seventy years the county was witness to vigorous growth and in-migration of individuals seeking the positive advantages of life in its several towns and outlying areas.

Decline occurred in almost every positive economic area. In 1930, agricultural workers in the county comprised over sixty percent of the workforce. By 1980 it was less than three percent. While "hard-surface" roads were built in the county, interstate commerce made possible by major roads mostly by-passed it, at the same time undercutting rail transportation. In the 1950s, Gassaway trainyard was dismantled, thus quickening the county's economic downslide. With the demise of the railroad, hundreds of employees lost their jobs, visitors no longer traveled by rail into and through the county, and markets for the few agricultural and manufactured goods still being produced in the region became even harder to reach. Furthermore, by the 1950s, those once the most vigorous supporters of civic affairs and projects in the county were no longer in a position to financially help such projects. Outmigration of the citizenry of the county was dramatic between 1920 and 1970, when the population declined from almost 24,000 to fewer than 13,000.

One of several state agencies responsible for economic development in central West Virginia described Braxton county's 1985 situation very differently than those local boosters I quoted from 1920:

> Braxton County lies in the center of the state and, like its neighboring counties, suffers economically from this geographic handicap. Until the building of Interstate 79, the county was isolated to a considerable degree from even more metropolitan areas of the state. Even with the completion of the interstate highway in the 1970s, the expected growth and development has been limited. ... The population of Braxton County declined steadily between 1940 and 1970. The county claimed 21,658

residents in 1940 but only 12,666 in 1970, a population loss of 41.5% in 30 years. This tremendous loss occurred as individuals were literally forced by economic considerations to abandon hillside farms and seek employment in the factories of Ohio, Michigan and other industrial states (W.Va. Dept. of Employment Security, 1985: 5&6).

Economic Decline and School Consolidation Issues

As suggested earlier, public schools and formal education appear to have been very important concerns of many Braxton Countians by the early twentieth century. This interest may have been explained by the relative affluence of the area during its boom years, and by the high expectations for schooling probably demanded by growing managerial and skilled laboring classes of parents. Burnsville, Sutton and Gassaway, for example, each built modern high schools in the second decade of the twentieth century, and competition existed between these towns with regard to which community had the best facility and programs.

Educational decline, however, began to set in around the time of the larger national depression of 1929. During the early 1930s, many large tracts of land held by outside interests were forfeited to the state for non-payment of taxes (taxes which were used at least partly to support public education). Without jobs and incomes, many remaining residents faced loss of property if previous tax rates were continued, and a statewide constitutional amendment was passed in 1932 which placed a cap on property assessments. This had a predictable impact on revenues available for local school funding. Due to lack of funds, many teachers remained unpaid and school terms were either shortened or the schools themselves closed altogether. In 1933, the state's 398 school districts were consolidated into 55

districts to coincide with county units (although they remained financially independent from the county political structure). In so doing, the state of West Virginia took on significant financing of schools in 55 county districts, making more than minimal local funding initiatives dependent on special elections held for such purposes.

In Braxton County, the six previous county and independent districts were combined into one, and the county superintendent and county school board became its governing authorities. While most metropolitan counties in West Virginia have frequently been able to raise extra local taxes for schooling (excess levies), the poorer rural counties, like Braxton, have not. And, since growing transportation costs and teacher salaries require the bulk of county funding in places like Braxton county, building maintenance and construction have typically suffered.

Documentation of the various types of school funding, consolidation and retrenchment problems related to economic decline and population outmigration are not generally available in the county, but one recovered document useful for such purposes was completed by an advisory group brought in from Pennsylvania by the Braxton County School Board in the mid 1960s. In this document, a tale of rural school closings throughout the 1950s and 1960s is described in some detail. The document outlines a general population decline in outlying areas of the county, and the movement of many remaining county children into the larger towns. Such trends led to the abandonment of schools in the outlying areas due to population decline as well as increased accreditation requirements.

Illustrative of the language of this report is the following:

> The population change in Braxton County as a whole has been one of decline over the last years. Most of the loss has been at the expense of the more rural and isolated areas with areas such as Sutton declining also, but at a much slower rate. Part of this rural decline has occurred because some of the people who are leaving the outlying areas are moving into or near towns such as Sutton. ... Within the Sutton Attendance Area, elementary school enrollment dropped from 1122 in 1957-58 to 870 in 1963-64. This was a loss of 252 students or 22.5 percent of elementary enrollment. In this same period, enrollment at the Sutton Elementary dropped from 485 in the 1957-58 school year to 340 in the 1963-64 school year. During this period, the schools of Windy Run, Stoney Creek, Maymond, Bug Ridge, Wolf Creek, and Marpleton were closed and their pupils transferred to the Sutton Elementary school (Weston, 1967:7-4).

Speaking about what would become a long-lasting problem in the county, this same planning document spoke favorably about a proposed new high school facility in the county which would "enable" the consolidation of the three county high schools into one facility. This would also help facilitate adaptive reuse of the old high school buildings as sites for handling the overflow of elementary children now available to be bused from "dilapidated" smaller structures in outer county areas. According to the consultant's report, 44 schools had been so consolidated in the few years just preceding their survey.

Economic Decline, Educational Instability and Students At Risk

The school(s) I am currently completing fieldwork in and the children who go there have inherited a great number of legacies from the larger boom and bust county history. Burnsville has been greatly affected during the past years by economic decline, population out-migration and school consolidation. When the county's high schools were consolidated in 1969, Burnsville's former 9-12 graders got on the bus and went down the road. Shortly thereafter, Burnsville's remaining movie theater, bowling alley and several restaurants which depended upon the high school crowd for business all went out of operation.

All of these developments have been further facilitated by the completion of I-79, which runs virtually overhead of Burnsville schools today. The interstate has in some ways dealt a deathblow to Burnsville: half of the town was torn down to build it, and people who are still left there now use the interstate to drive either north or south to shop or recreate. The county high school too was also made possible to some extent by the interstate, for it sits at the Flatwoods exit some twelve miles south of Burnsville.

Most local residents believe in the final analysis that the coming of the interstate was a good thing. Its building provided hundreds and hundreds of construction jobs for almost a decade in a place which has long depended on just such a "boom" operation for work. Furthermore, many claim, much of the part of town torn down for the interstate's construction were the "beer joints" and decaying frame structures which couldn't be improved much anyway. One could probably raise a good argument about the relative costs versus benefits of I-79 here if one wanted to. I haven't specifically attempted this yet.

Nevertheless, when it comes to (high) school talk, relative costs versus benefits in Burnsville clearly fall on the negative side. Even after twenty years, a lingering bitterness towards county school officials remains in town. A variety of promises to county citizenry regarding the many benefits of the consolidated high school were never delivered upon - because the county ran short of funds to finish the larger project. To this day, home basketball games and track events are held at other county facilities because the Braxton County High School Gym is too small, and because there is no track to run around. And, as most researchers on rural schools will clearly substantiate, athletic programs in rural school communities are among the most popular school-related events (e.g., Peshkin, 1978).

My current research also continues at a feverish pace, for one of Burnsville's (administratively) two schools, the middle school, is being consolidated next year with the county's two other middle schools in order to (again) save money for the district. Like the former high school consolidation project, middle school consolidation is supposed to provide an attractive and new facility with a larger and more varied curriculum. Not surprisingly, many if not most Burnsville residents remain opposed to the school consolidation. They fear further deterioration of their small town, and are dubious about the claimed quality of the proposed building, based on their earlier experiences with the high school. But they weren't really asked to approve the consolidation anyway. This is another story.

Since the announcement of proposed middle school consolidation, instabilities associated with the proposed new facility continue to affect school climate throughout the county. On the one hand, construction appears behind schedule, and not even the contractor is certain if the new building will be

completed on time. In addition, changing state policies on seniority versus staff quality in the hiring of teachers, bus drivers and custodial staff for consolidating school districts have colored much of personnel issues there for almost two years.

For example, it was hoped by the county administration that school building and staffing a completely new school facility would allow for new school hirings independent of traditional seniority-based protocols. However, having chosen and partially trained staff for the new school based upon applicant qualifications, the state overrruled such attempts in another county school system, and Braxton County decided to comply with seniority guidelines in their final staffing decisions. Many teachers throughout the system thus had their 1992 career expectations significantly altered in the Spring of 1991, and a number who were previously chosen to teach at the new middle school were cut completely from county teaching roles based on seniority considerations. All eight of Burnsville Middle School's regular classroom teachers were formerly chosen to teach at the county middle school based upon their teaching evaluations, but seniority protocols reduced this number to six, and the two "losers" were RIFfed (reduced in force) and have no job at all in the school system now for 1992-1993.

How the county statistics on economic decline, population out-migration and school consolidation can actually be seen and experienced in Burnsville is a general concern of my current work. I'm pressed for time right now, because none of the 129 grade 5-8 students or twelve middle school teachers (and part-time teachers) I have been following and/or interviewing are scheduled to be around Burnsville in 1992-93. In fact, a central theme which has emerged in my research has become the number and types of people who "are not around" anymore in Burnsville.

These are probably the sorts of people who used to provide a major source of financial and emotional support for Burnsville school. In an age in which community support of learner outcomes has increasingly been championed as an important strategy for improving all schools, the absence of most accomplished and now distant white-collar graduates of Burnsville High may be significant (Coleman, 1987; DeYoung, 1989b).

For quite some time, Burnsville has been a place where the only time highly educated and professional people - other than schoolteachers - could be seen on the street is during the spring and summer when large families have their reunions involving former residents long since removed to Michigan or Ohio for a good job. One of the biggest annual gatherings in Burnsville is the Kanawha Alumni Association which meets on Memorial Day weekend every May. This association of approximately 500 members are all graduates of Burnsville High (or graduates of the county high school who would have graduated from Burnsville), and is the largest high school alumni association in the state - even though Burnsville hasn't been a high school for over twenty years. Unfortunately, there is almost no interaction anymore between Kanawha Alumni and current students at Burnsville schools. The alumni don't participate in any of the award ceremonies of the school - many of which are now specifically organized to publicize the achievements of elementary and middle school students who would be considered at-risk by most educators. On the one hand, most alumni members live hundreds of miles away. And, as the current president phrased it recently, "there really hasn't been much enthusiasm for the school (programs) once the high school was taken away."

While most children (above the age of 10) and adults who used to be found in Burnsville won't "be around" next year, the school building will remain. The Braxton County Board of Education would like to build a new elementary school facility on Kanawha street, but they haven't got enough money. So, 150 or so young children will remain in portions of the old facility for at least a few more years. This appears as somewhat ironic to local residents, because one reason they were told that older children were being removed was because of the asbestos hazards of the old building which was too expensive to remove. Furthermore, even if/when children no longer attend Burnsville school, the building will probably remain as a testimonial to what once was. The old three story brick structure is too expensive to demolish given its asbestos hazards, and it is unlikely that any other organized group can afford to rent and maintain the property. After all, there are already several other abandoned commercial properties on Kanawha Street adjacent to Burnsville school. Many are condemned properties which remain closed and locked. And since there is no demand for these spaces, they remain as ghosts of a distant and thriving past.

For that matter, much of central West Virginia is dotted with old clapboard buildings which were once schools. These frame structures, with banks of windows all around, are easy to spot along most of the smaller roads in the state. Joining their ranks now are a later generation of small town brick schools currently being closed for consolidated county-wide schools. And who knows where it might end? The state legislature passed a bill in 1989 requiring county school boards to hold regional meetings on the feasibility of cross-county or regional school consolidation, particularly for small and dilapidated county high schools.

At-Risk Students in Braxton County (and Burnsville) Schools

Some of the themes I have mentioned here are further elaborated upon in my most recent book (DeYoung, 1991a); others are being developed in a forthcoming one (DeYoung, 1993). The at-risk concerns of this monograph are but one focus of my current research, yet even the limited space I have to give to it here will hopefully be of interest.

Assuming poverty as a primary indicator, more than half of all Braxton County's students are officially at-risk. The county's economy has been depressed for over a decade, and the official unemployment rate in mid-1992 is approximately 20%. Of course, in many rural counties like Braxton, there are many "Discouraged Workers" who no longer look for work, and who therefore are not registered as officially unemployed. Current economic development patterns there are of four different types, none of which suggest major infusions of income or affluence in the foreseeable future. Coal operations are scheduled to begin again in several years in the southern end of the county, but the jobs they may provide will just about offset those lost last year at another site. Several years ago the operator of the county landfill applied for a permit to enable his facility to begin bringing in large quantities of out-of-state garbage. At the current time, this "economic development" scheme remains on hold.

A major new "industry" in Braxton County with few current detractors is a rapidly growing service industry based upon interstate travel. The Flatwoods exit on I-79 now has a new McDonald's, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Dairy Queen, Western Steer Steakhouse, a drive-through beverage (beer and wine) store, several large gas stations, two truck stops and several inexpensive motels. All of these

places provide many minimum wage jobs for local citizens, but few require advanced education or inspire career orientations at the county high school located just a stone's throw from most of these businesses.

Another development near the high school and the fast-food restaurants is the soon to be completed regional jail. This facility is slated to hold prisoners from local surrounding counties, and was not resisted vigorously like the larger one proposed closer to Burnsville which was to hold out-of-state prisoners convicted of more serious crimes. And the regional jail is thought of more highly because dozens of county residents will get a chance to work there as cooks, janitors and guards. The county already has lots of people who may be able to cook and clean at the prison: these are the sorts of jobs also fought for at the county schools. And since the county's largest employer (i.e., the school system) is laying-off workers due to consolidation and state funding cutbacks, competition for these jobs is likely to be intense.

Training for guard positions, probation officers, and other agents of the prison system is more complicated, however, and two year college programs at several smaller state institutions have already begun to offer degrees relevant to such positions. It appears to state higher education leaders as one of the few growth areas for higher education in years to come.

In any event, the 1986 per capita income figure for the county was only $7,548.00. With regards to county children living in poverty, all of the system's nine elementary and middle schools had enrollments with greater than fifty percent of their children (99% of whom are white) below the poverty line in 1991. In one elementary school, 77% of the children received free /reduced lunch; in the least

poverty affected school "only" 53% fell into this category. To signify how the national economy affects Braxton County schools, enrollment levels in the county's pre-kindergarten programs have risen significantly during the past several years. Central office staff believe that many families now coming into Braxton County are back living with parents and siblings in the wake of job losses in metropolitan America. Many of these families are allegedly waiting for (typically minimum wage) jobs to be restored. Meanwhile, the number of pre-kindergarten poor children qualifying in 1992 for head start money has increased by almost twenty percent (to 74%) since last year.

At the combined Burnsville schools, 63% of the students received free or reduced-price meals. Burnsville schools also have a hot breakfast program. According to the principal, however, the actual figure would be much higher were all those eligible to apply. He even mentioned several teachers in the schools (all of whom are female) whose children would probably qualify for reduced priced lunches since they each had several children and were single heads of households.

Statistical information on students in both schools is tabulated in Braxton County for a variety of reasons, and suggests the socioeconomic background of the school. Sixteen percent of the student bodies are from "professional" households - many are the children of teachers there. Twenty-eight percent are from blue collar homes, but frequently children from these homes live in households where one parent is away from home weekly or monthly working on a project in another county or state. Thirty percent of the schools' 297 students come from homes where parents work in unskilled trades or service industries; one percent from agriculturally based households; eighteen percent from families with just enough

income to not qualify for welfare; and seven percent from families on AFDC. Given the mismatch between actual family income and official job categories, it appears that workers in rural Braxton County receive substantially less for similar sorts of work than do those in metropolitan places - as the rural economists discussed in Part I of this essay suggest.

One particular interest of mine has been the backgrounds and schooling situations of Burnsville Middle School's current seventh grade students. Of the thirty one students who started school in September, only twenty-eight remain in April. Of these, fourteen live in households with both parents working; four have at least one working parent absent on a weekly basis; two live in multi-generational homes and twelve live in homes either without both natural parents or in single-parent families. Mr. McCoy classifies eight of his current twenty-eight students as at-risk either because of their attitudes toward school, the attitudes of their parents toward school, or due to the attitudes of parents toward their children. And, unlike many principals in metropolitan areas, Mr. M. claims his knowledge of each student's situation is based on twenty-two years of experience with each of the families of these children and from working with most of them for seven or eight years.

District Philosophy for At-risk Students

Instructional programs county-wide are theoretically based upon what the county superintendent argues is an at-risk educational philosophy - for the whole district (DeYoung, 1991a). In his judgement, schools in central West Virginia can only be successful if they provide local children with the types of programs and instruction which will make them successful in life, and which will win the larger

support of the entire community. He suggests this has not always been the case in Braxton County.

With regard to instruction, this concern is operationalized in several specific ways. District philosophy is built around the notion that basic literacy and mathematical skills are a must. Therefore, academic instruction, constant monitoring of pupil performance, strong building leadership, high expectations and a positive learning climate are emphasized at all schools. In effect then, guidelines of the Effective Schools movement underlie many of the day to day operations of Braxton County schools, and almost half of the county's principals and a significant percentage of the district's teachers have been sponsored to attend state-level workshops on Effective School organizational strategies. Apparently the system-wide pressure upon emphasizing academic skills has paid off in Braxton County, for it's schools have been among the states highest grade-level scorers (at the earlier grades) since the mid-1980s.

In addition, district education policy is to help subsidize a number of out-of-school educational endeavors as support services to the school system. The superintendent and school board believe that building public trust in the schools and providing positive learning experiences for children require recreational and literary support systems in the larger community as well as the schools - services which the superintendent believes must be facilitated today by the county school system in the absence of federal programs cut during the 1980s. Thus, even in the face of district budget shortfalls, the school system has helped fund the three town libraries and helped to raise funds for the county recreational park located not far from the high school. The system also is quite aggressive with regard to its GED and active

parenting programs. Like many other rural school systems, the central office in Braxton County is extremely pro-active with regard to applying for state and federal grants for supplemental programs consistent with district educational philosophy.

At-risk Programs in Burnsville Schools

Burnsville schools have historically had significant community support, although instructional programs currently involving parents are relatively low. Many poorer families live out of town and aren't able to drive to the school easily. Other families have two wage earners which makes volunteering to help difficult. There are adult education and active parenting programs available in Burnsville, but these are both small and run out of the Board office and the library rather than the schools themselves. And, unlike metropolitan schools which may be able to bolster community support via school-business partnerships, such partnerships are not possible in Burnsville, for it has no businesses to speak of - anymore. Local churches are heavily involved in the life of Burnsville schools, but formal linkages between them are no longer allowed. And the U.S. Corps of Engineers which is titularly the partner of Burnsville schools is a federal agency and unable to donate money (or much time) to the school. Yet, there remains a belief in town that Burnsville schools provide a sound education, and that the teachers there usually do a good job. So too, as a small town (population approximately 600), most teachers and non-certified workers (two male janitors and half a dozen female teacher aides and cooks) have been in the school for a number of years. Many who work in the school graduated from it when it was a high school. Thus almost all school people are well known locally, and they appear very trusted by the public at large.

Mr. McCoy, the principle for both schools, has also been at Burnsville for twenty-two years. His father was a railroad man, as was the father of the county superintendent. And, Mr. McCoy has great community support for his school leadership as he is also centrally involved in almost all other civic activities in what remains of Burnsville: he is an elder in the Methodist Church which used to be integrally involved with the school; he teaches hunter-safety to most of the middle school children (as deer hunting is a primary fact-of-life in Braxton County); he is a county scout leader (cub scouts **and** boy scouts); he is treasurer of his bowling league; and is a member of several other local civic groups.

Burnsville schools, have typically enjoyed stable building leadership and staffing. Budget cutbacks have cost the schools teachers and staff over the years, but almost never do teachers in Braxton County resign and move away. Further, since there is a great identification with the schools, most local parents insist upon and support school - based efforts to maintain discipline and a positive school climate. Burnsville schools retain an emphasis on instruction and academics, and several teachers there have either won statewide awards for innovation in instruction; others are on statewide improvement committees in their curricular fields. Community support, both historically and currently, is high, and like other rural schools, support of athletic events (which draw the most parents to school now) is a major place to see how the community identifies with Burnsville Middle School. Faculty morale remained high at both schools in 1991 and 1992, and a testimonial to the warmth and respect for the school and its programs is reflected in the fact that almost every teacher who has children brings them to school with them so that they can go to school there.

Paradoxically perhaps, Mr. McCoy reports few formal programs for at-risk children in his school. While arguing that most Burnsville children are developmentally or socially at-risk, he suggests that the caring environment directed toward school success which is focused upon enhancing positive self-concepts among all children in the school continues to be the emphasis. Such school wide programs as Assertive Discipline and School-Based Assistance Teams have been proposed and instituted in Burnsville schools, but special pull-out programs where identified at-risk children are identified are not part of the schools' philosophy. In a school where most children are recognized as at-risk one way or another, and where most children and their parents are already known to most teachers and staff, formal pull-out programs for particular children with particular learning difficulties would undoubtedly overwhelm most other school-related activities. There is a part-time gifted education teacher, a part-time speech and hearing teacher and a full time special education teacher; however, because these individuals typically have multiple certifications, have worked "both sides of the street" with exceptional learners, and frequently share instructional spaces and materials, younger children would probably find it difficult to comprehend how they had been grouped for particular attention in these schools were they interested.

One of the specific efforts undertaken at most Braxton County schools - including Burnsville's - are routine school-wide award ceremonies which publicize student success. Good grades, positive citizenship and special awards are widely proclaimed throughout the school and throughout the year in Burnsville schools, even though many parents cannot or do not attend such events.

Concerns at Braxton County High School

School consolidation in rural places which are pleased with their schools often comes hard. This has been the case in Braxton County for many years, and most particularly since 1969 when the three county high schools were merged. While organizing and/or reorganizing elementary and middle school programs toward a general "at-risk" philosophy appears to have been successful, the major battle in Braxton County during the past decade has been at the high school level. Here, arguments over vocationalism versus academics and school wide emphasis upon meeting student needs versus interests of those trained/interested primarily in subject matter specialization have been pronounced. Recently, establishing a school wide climate of caring and open communication appears to have been accomplished, but as recently as two years ago, the same school system which produces among the highest elementary reading scores statewide was also a district with one of the state's highest high school dropout rates: approximately thirty percent of freshmen in 1986 failed to graduate with their cohort in 1990. By national standards, such a rate may not be unusual, but in West Virginia this is viewed as excessively high.

Since Braxton County is a place where few jobs requiring a high school degree are locally available, where poverty and dysfunctional families are prevalent, and where higher education opportunities were historically absent, "explaining" the dropout rate as functions of extra-school factors has a long history there. Meanwhile, the quality of academic programs at the high school has remained arguably high for a high school in a rural and depressed area. Even with a dropout rate in the high twenties (in 1989 and 1990), several academic specializations have garnered statewide attention there throughout the decade, including both the drama

and journalism programs. As well, the BCHS marching band is a strong source of local pride among students and administrators alike - even though few of the athletic programs have ever achieved the fame promised once consolidation took place. Given these dynamics then, some (like the county superintendent) have argued that the high school dropout rate was previously a push-out rate, where students not interested in completing school were allowed to leave, and where classroom discipline problems led first to the principle's office and subsequently to suspensions and expulsions. As is probably the case in most high schools, particular areas of the county were blamed for contributing to high drop-out rates. Burnsville students were one of the several groups of students cited by BCHS teachers as contributing to their problem.

Devising and implementing a strategy for compelling Braxton County High School to redefine its overall purpose as one consistent with central office views on at-risk students has been a primary local theme of schooling there for at least five years. In effect, a legacy of academic emphasis and strict disciplinary standards represented and enforced by the former principal and a number of teachers was directly and indirectly attacked by the district central office. "Blaming the victims," however, was one of the problems of BCHS staff, according to the county superintendent. Under the rationale of improving school climate to improve the likelihood of school success among the at-risk student population, the high school was in effect told to take "ownership" of the dropout problem rather than to attribute dropout rates to contextual factors or to "problem" students (DeYoung, 1991a).

In 1987 monies from Job Training Partnership Act and Appalachian Regional Commission were obtained for an innovative dropout prevention program based loosely upon cooperative learning strategies (Slavin, 1987). The logic behind this program was that "student blockages" were the primary reason behind student decisions to drop out of school. Furthermore, according to the program, dropping out of school is but the final event in a student's career, an event that can be negated if/when teachers and other school based staff undertake the task of analyzing and remediating the causes of such blockages. Accordingly, faculty/staff/student groups called "student advocacy teams" were to be structured to intercede in the school careers of identified at-risk students. Great pressure was put on the school to utilize such tactics over and above the wishes of the building principal who was alleged to be less interested in such school improvement activities.

Further details of warring factions in Braxton County High School over what to do about the at-risk student population are available in DeYoung (1991a). The bottom line on the matter remains, however, that refashioning the BCHS focus upon the needs of at-risk students required an important leadership change which occurred at the beginning of the 1990 school year.

In 1992, school success of many students, including those identified by Braxton County High School as at-risk students, is much improved. The projected dropout rate this year stands at 8%. The four year college going rate for 1991 graduates is 50%, up from only 25% only several years earlier. Average daily attendance is up, as were 1991 CTBS scores.

As I have not been specifically following dynamics at the high school as I did in the late 1980s, I have had to inquire from my previous sources as to speculations

about the pronounced changes there with regard to at-risk student success rates. According to my sources, at least three school-improvement thrusts relevant to interests of this essay have occurred there since 1989. The primary change involves a change in school climate, whereby the new principle has announced his intention to have **all** students succeed in BCHS, not just those academically inclined. He is alleged to have communicated these objectives to the entire school by having an open-door policy for all students, not waiting for only disciplinary referrals from teachers. At the same time, he has instituted a number of rewards for perfect attendance, including early school dismissal for some students and free entry into a number of school functions. According to the school guidance counselor, his philosophy, which is much changed from those of his predecessors, is that the role of high school "is not to punish students, but to help them." He is credited by her with treating all BCHS students with dignity.

It seems highly unlikely that one person, i.e., the new principal, could transform BCHS as dramatically as the statistics indicate in just two years. More plausibly, his appointment to the school also provided a catalyst for school improvement already present but underdeveloped there in the years just prior to his hiring. So too, while the a "climate of success" appears to have become a major preoccupation of current school staff, specific skills and programs for at-risk students are also in full force now. At-risk students are identified upon their entry into the ninth grade by eighth grade counselors, who note earlier absenteeism and academic performance patterns. So too, careful monitoring of freshman performance is made at the high school, and students performing poorly or routinely missing classes are identified and tutored early in their programs. Three

Chapter 1 teachers in English, Social Studies and Mathematics are used to work one-on-one with students having difficulty. As well, approximately 80 students (of a total student population of 750) are in an adopt-a-student program this year. In addition to remedial and tutorial help, programs to heighten the expectations of students for post-high school opportunities have been installed in BCHS during the past two years. A student shadowing program has been put into place whereby students go into the arguably few local businesses and workplaces to observe the world of work. Most recently, BCHS obtained external funding to underwrite their Aim High program. This program has enabled all interested students to visit various higher education institutions in the state, and to help them understand the requirements and protocols necessary to attend them. School officials cite this program in particular as one which may explain 1991-1992 school success.

Tensions between vocational and academic programs and interests abound in rural high schools like BCHS. Over 90% of all students there take some vocational courses: meanwhile the academic requirements for higher education continue to escalate. This has led throughout West Virginia to some tension over the funding of different high school teaching positions. Nevertheless, in order to expand the curriculum to accommodate both academic and vocational interests, the school system has pushed some of the college-prep courses down into the eighth grade, while striving to continue most of the vocational programs (like keyboarding) of potential relevance to both academic and vocational students.

Ironically, the new middle school is specifically championed by the central office for many of the purposes outlined above: to begin at an earlier age preparing students for post high school opportunities **and** to make it economically feasible to

teach courses like Algebra and Foreign Languages in the eighth grade, rather than waiting to the ninth. Because of their small student populations, it is argued, the older middle schools cannot perform the teaching and career counseling functions of the soon-to-be completed county middle school.

In effect, then, Braxton County schools are hoping to better prepare young adolescents for eventual college enrollments with their new middle school reorganization. The nurturing, more personal and alleged family-like atmosphere now present in the county's middle schools - features which are the philosophical backbone of the national "middle school concept" - are viewed by the county superintendent as one factor leading to ninth-grade dropout. Students from the more isolated and impoverished reaches of the county, the argument runs, don't make the transition to a more impersonal high school environment well coming from the smaller town middle schools. So, a major hope for the county middle school is that a somewhat less personalistic middle school experience beginning at grade five will help students better make the transition to ninth grade at the nearby high school.

Meanwhile, softening the impersonality at BCHS continues at the present time. In addition to a more student-centered school climate and high expectations and support services for at-risk high school students, Braxton County High School also subscribes to the notion that outside community agencies and programs targeted at adolescents are to be used and abetted via the school. At least three physical and mental health agencies in the county are routine participants in the life of BCHS, and home-bound and adult education programs are aggressively pursued by the high school for those students who have either dropped out of school or are

having personal or emotional problems which make regular school attendance difficult.

In a number of ways, then, BCHS is alleged to have altered a more traditional model of high school as a site for academic instruction to one of advocacy, referral **and** instruction. At the same time, continued lack of funding for school programs and initiatives related to needs of at-risk students remains problematic, as state per-pupil funding formulas ever challenge the special programs and interests of the building principal and his staff. Trying to do more with less has typically been the case in Braxton County, West Virginia. And this tradition, like the others mentioned earlier, also remains a powerful theme there.

Conclusion

The educational "stories" I am interested in telling about Braxton County, West Virginia and its schools reflect but one set of iterations of rural life and rural education in the U.S. There are virtually no majority - minority conflicts in this county and there are no open political feuds which frequently affect community life and schooling dynamics in many rural places. People here trust the schools and revere the good teachers who have labored for so long for comparatively little reward. Nevertheless, there are significant educational issues and problems here which approximate many of those talked of early in this essay and which are specifically related to the futures of at-risk students.

Braxton County schools, as most schools in economically depressed and isolated places, face a number of problems in dealing with their at-risk student populations. Because local tax dollars still are a primary funding mechanism for local schools, places with few resources have difficulty in funding special programs

for at-risk students. Thus, **inherited** economic disadvantage in rural places usually has consequences **for the present and for the future**. Redefining the economic base upon which depressed rural schools can build their programs has to be near the top of the list of any systematic effort to improve the life chances of at-risk rural students.

Redefining the **purpose** of schools must also be a primary concern of schools with significant numbers of children at-risk of school incompletion. In places where desired role models are absent and the local structure of opportunities is bleak, schools must attempt to demonstrate and inculcate the incentives necessary for rural students to complete school. Such incentives may more often be taken for granted in many suburban schools: but they cannot be in places like Braxton County, West Virginia. School people there recognize they are enmeshed in an economic, historic and cultural battle, not just an instructional one.

In my judgement, Braxton County schools do more with what they have then many school systems do. They provide sound academic programs, comprehensive services, and an attitude of caring. They intervene forcibly in the cultural politics of the United States, for they instill values and teach skills required for a national culture and an international economy in a region arguably socially and economically scarred by national success in such areas.

Effective rural schools typically "export" their best "products," leaving behind families and communities which often are or ought to be anxious or ambivalent about school success and school completion. In places like Braxton County, schools are arguably a more central institution to the individual success of at-risk students than they are in metropolitan America; yet, they have an even more

difficult time in providing the sorts of education and cultural services necessary to facilitate student persistence and school completion. National efforts to improve the life chances of rural at-risk children ought to better recognize and better support rural schools like those of Braxton County, West Virginia. They are not the cause of economic decline in rural places: rather, they are the institutions which have to live and work with the consequences of such decline.

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plus appendix. see draft if it needs to be included. otherwise it may be cited in the CDF report.